A COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

ARISTOCRATIC XTRATERRESTRIAL TIME-TRAVELING THIEVES™

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FRED WANTS TO STAMP OUT YOU REALITY IN COMICS!

"X-THIEVES" X-TRA!

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

I'm sure many of you are familiar with some of the problems the direct sales comics market has run into lately. The biggest one — and the one that will most directly affect us — is the over abundance of black-and-white titles. Coupled with an appalling scarcity of good black-and-white titles, this has the potential of spelling disaster for the black-and-white books. How did things get this bad?

First, of course, there are all the people who suddenly decided they should publish black-and-white comics. Many good things have come out of the black-and-white explosion, The FISH POLICE, the return of ZOT! (one of my personal favorites), the X-THIEVES themselves. However, anyone who visits a comic shop that carries a full line of books has seen the other side of the coin. Books that should have been printed as fanzines — if printed at all. These books are not going to sell. They're going to sit on the shelves for months, then be moved to some back-issue bin where they'll stay forever. Meanwhile, the store owner has money tied up in those books.

The retailers also have to be considered a part of the problem. Many of them seem to have gotten caught up — like the "publishers" mentioned above — in the rush to have lots of copies of the next TURTLES or FISH POLICE. They seem to order large numbers of books they know nothing about. When the books turn out to be bad, they're stuck holding them. Meanwhile, books like the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS still struggle for every sale. Yes, I'm prejudiced in favor of the KNIGHTS — I created them, after all.

Certainly, guessing how many copies of a comic to order is a difficult thing to do. The retailers don't want to get stuck with too many extra copies of a book. But it would seem to be common sense to consider some things prior to ordering: Has the company got any other books out? If so, they should give a fair indication of the product you can expect to see from them. When you read this we will have released our 18th *issue of SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, for instance. Surely, such longevity should prove something to the store owners!*

Henry

Dear Henry, Mark, and DAK:

Well, well, well . . . what a clever trick. You really did it this time! By putting Southern Knights in X-THIEVES you've hooked me for life, and it's gonna cost me dearly in back-issues costs. Yeah, I liked X-THIEVES #1 . . . *and* the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS. Now I've gotta play ketchup, er catsup, I mean catch-up and get the complete SK series. That's it, I'm *hooked*.

X-THIEVES #1: There's something I couldn't quite understand . . . you solved all of Fred and Bianca's problems (with the CI "credit" card). *Now* what're you gonna do? Don't you know "problems" are a big cellar, er, seller? Lookit that Spider-Guy over at Marvel. Now he's *big* on problems! And *he's* got 3 books of his own! "Why, without problems, everybody'd be . . . happy. But if everyone was happy there'd never be a love song. Oh joy, to the world . . ."— **Harry Nilsson**, "Joy."

Er, um. I guess I sorta got sidetracked. Anyway, all I really wanted to say was, as far as these b&w comics go, I'm sure you'll be a survivor (with both SK and X-THIEVES) of the "bust" now here. As my comic dealer said, "b&w's are dyin."' (Thanks, Vince!)

A true fan forever,

Tim Turcotte
18 Farm Lane
Seabrook, NH 03874

Heh, heh, heh! Our plot snared another one, DAK! And who says we've solved all of Fred and Bianca's problems? Certainly we've delayed them a bit, but have you ever heard of a tax collection agency that would let a little red tape get in the way of collecting taxes?

Dear Henry, Mark and David:

Okay, Henry, maybe you're right. Maybe I *do* take this mag a little too seriously, as you state in #1's lettercol. (But then, we all know that I'm a totally serious kind of guy who never ever relaxes and has a bit of fun in the wacky world of comics, right? Um, I said, *right?*) So, let me just say right off the top that I know that all of this (your mag, etc.) is just in good fun and that I shouldn't get too worked up about an innocent ole comic book.

However,

However, just because something is "all in fun" doesn't mean that there can't be a serious side to it (whether this is intended by its creator or not). Under certain circumstances, laughter entails acceptance and if this is acceptance of concepts that may not be totally proper then this can be very serious indeed. Furthermore, such laughter can be *with* someone/something and/or against somebody else or some other thing. In other words, by our laughter we may take sides. And if we are taking the wrong side, then this too can be serious.

The point of my previous letter (and this one, too, I guess) was essentially that the humor in X-THIEVES does make the reader take sides and that the side we are supposed to take is less than admirable, ie. the side of thieves, etc. Now, of course, you stack the deck in their favour so that while they may be theorectically the wrong side, they *appear* to be the best choice at the moment. Last issue, you did that principally by making the government agents into totally disreputable and unlikable characters. However, this was not possible in this issue since the guest-stars were our beloved (and I mean *that* seriously) Southern Knights. So, you choose the alternative method of giving Fred and Bianca a worthwhile mission, one that the Knights could and did support in good conscience.

Still, none of this solves my basic problem with this series. You seem to be saying that it is okay to be a thief and rogue as long as you're a fun kind of person.

Let's look at part of your reply to my letter. "What is the difference between the X-Thieves and the IRS agent? Simple, *his* form of stealing is *much worse*! How many of you readers would actually pay taxes if the government wasn't extorting them from you? At least with Fred and Bianca, your insurance will replace the cost of the goods stolen!" First, I *hope* that you said this with tongue at least partially in cheek, Henry! But, where to begin?

How are taxes "stealing" or "extortion"?! Taxation is mandated by laws that are passed by freely elected officials. Taxes are for the general welfare and protection of the people. Sure, we do not all agree with all taxes or all that they are used for, but no system is perfect. And if we don't

(CONTINUED ON INSIDE BACK COVER)

ARISTOCRATIC X-TRATERRESTRIAL TIME-TRAVELING THIEVES

T.M.

REALITY WHAT A CONCEPT

WRITER/CO-CREATOR
HENRY VOGEL

ARTIST/CO-CREATOR
MARK PROPST

CONTINUITY INQUISITION HQ...
I FINALLY GOT THE PERFECT PLAN! FRED AND BIANCA WON'T STAND A CHANCE!
A PLAN TO STOP THE THIEVES?! GREAT! WHAT IS IT?
DANNY, THIS IS A LANDMARK OCCASION! MY PLAN CAN'T FAIL!
BIANCA
PANSAFREDICOPACOG
CONTINUITY INQUISITION, ENEMIES OF:
TOPS ON THE CI MOST-WANTED LIST ARE PASAFREDICOPACOG—OR FRED FOR SHORT—AND BIANCA. IT IS RUMORED THAT ERB TARKAS HEADS A SPECIAL CI BRANCH WHOSE SOLE TASK IS THE CAPTURE OF THESE TWO THIEVES.
—THE SPACEFARER'S GUIDE

LETTERS
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ERB TARKAS'S OFFICE...
NO LONGER WILL THE REST OF THE CI SNEER AT OUR BRANCH!
THAT'S WONDERFUL, MR. TARKAS! WHAT --
I'LL FINALLY GET THE RECOGNITION I DESERVE!
SOMETHING THAT'S LONG OVERDUE! BUT THE --
LATEST CRISES 142 DAYS LATE. CANCEL DR. RESOLICIT!
IT'S A DAY THAT'LL GO DOWN IN CI HISTORY!
BOSS-- THE PLAN?
AREN'T YOU EVEN THE TINIEST BIT INTERESTED IN THE DETAILS?
YES!
YES!
A THOUSAND TIMES, YES!
HM, I THINK YOU NEED TO LEARN TO RELAX, DANNY. THE PRESSURES OF THE JOB SEEM TO BE GETTING TO YOU!
UH, RIGHT... NOW, ABOUT THIS PLAN?
THE PLAN? WHY HE'S RIGHT BEHIND THIS DOOR!
CLICK WHIR
HE--?!
YES! THE ONE THING FRED AND BIANCA SHOULD FEAR MOST! MY CROWNING GLORY! MY ULTIMATE VICTORY--
--THE STATISTICALLY UNLIMITED POSSIBILITY INHIBITING DEVICE!
3GASP3 BUT BOSS-- I THOUGHT HE WAS BUSY IN ANOTHER UNIVERSE!
HE WAS UNTIL I MADE HIM AN OFFER HE COULDN'T REFUSE--CONTROL OF THE INDEPENDENTS. THIEVES, THAT IS!
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SEVERAL PARSECS AWAY...
AND NOW, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT THE INCREDIBLE, THE AMAZING--THE SHORT--PANSAFREDICOPACOG WILL, WITH BEAUTIFUL BIANCA'S ASSISTANCE, ONCE AGAIN ATTEMPT TO LEAP TO YON WINDOW ABOVE!
DRUM ROLL, PLEASE!
SILENCE! AS AN ARTIST I MUST CONCENTRATE UPON MY WORK!
ARTIST, MY ASS! QUIT STALLING AND GET ON WITH IT!
FRED'S GRACEFUL APPROACH BRINGS GASPS FROM THE CROWD!
AND GAGS FROM HIS PARTNER...
LIFT-OFF! WE HAVE LIFT-OFF!
YEAH!
UP, UP, AND...
oh damn
WOW
3

I DON'T GET IT! WE'VE NEVER HAD THIS PROBLEM BEFORE!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN "WE"? I'M THE ONE WITH THE SORE BUTT!
ALL RIGHT, THEN, LET'S TRY IT-- WITH ME ON TOP!
SOUNDS LIKE FUN TO ME!
BUT ISN'T THIS ALLEY A BIT PUBLIC--
SHUT UP AND PICK ME UP!
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT I WAS DOING!
THUD
YOU'RE LOSING YOUR TOUCH, FRED! WHEN YOU CAN'T EVEN PICK UP A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN--
ME?! HA! YOU'VE BEEN PUTTING ON WEIGHT!
OH, YEAH? WELL, I'VE BEEN WATCHING--
NEVER MIND.. MY FAMOUS TAIL JUMP WILL GET ME UP THERE!
IF IT'S SO FAMOUS, WHY HAVEN'T I HEARD OF IT?
BECAUSE YOUR TAIL IS SO MUCH MORE FUN TO JUMP!
YEAH-- AND UNLIKE YOURS, MINE WORKS AS ADVERTISED!
HEY--ZOOFE-- I'M REAL GOOD WITH MY TAIL--
--AND YOU KNOW IT!
WELL, BE THAT AS IT MAY-- GOT ANY IDEAS FOR GETTING INTO THIS BUILDING? WE'VE GOT A JOB TO DO, YOU KNOW!
BIANCA -- HOW COULD YOU DOUBT ME? OF COURSE, I HAVE AN IDEA!

SECONDS LATER...
THE ELEVATOR? YOU CALL THIS A GOOD IDEA?
YOU DIDN'T ASK IF IT WAS GOOD--JUST IF I HAD AN IDEA!
STILL... THE ELEVATOR?
I KNOW IT'S RATHER COMMON, BUT NOTHING ELSE SEEMS TO BE WORKING!
MOMENTS LATER...
HOW EMBARRASSING! DID YOU HAVE TO YELL "HOLD THE ELEVATOR" AS WE WERE MAKING OUR GETAWAY?
IF YOU THINK ELEVATORS ARE PLEBEIAN, YOU OUGHT TO TRY STAIRS SOME TIME!
MEANWHILE, AT THE NEARBY FREDMOBILE...
I THINK I'VE JUST ABOUT GOT IT! LEMME HAVE THE #2 MAGNAPICK.
WHAT A HAUL THIS'LL BE. WE'RE GONNA BE THE RICHEST KIDS IN SCHOOL!
YEP! AND THAT OUGHTA TURN THE BABES ON!
NOW, IF I CAN JUST GET PAST THIS BOOBI-TRAP...
THAT'S ALMOST RIGHT--NOT BAD FOR A COUPLE OF BOOBIES!
WHO DO YOU TH--
uh oh
YOU!
ME... YOU BOYS LOOK LIKE TALENTED THIEVES--
--BUT TALENT LIKE THAT NEEDS DEVELOPING!

HE'S RIGHT! YOUR HEARTS ARE IN THE RIGHT PLACE, BUT...
BUT IT TAKES MORE THAN HEART TO MAKE A GOOD THIEF -- IT TAKES A TRAINED MIND AS WELL!
WOW!
I NEVER THOUGHT OF THAT!
RIGHT!
THIEVERY IS BEST LEFT TO TRAINED PROFESSIONALS! AMATEURS NOT ONLY LOWER THE LEVEL OF WORKMANSHIP, THEY COULD ALSO GET HURT!
HERE'S THE ADDRESS OF A WOMAN IN THE AREA WHO'LL TEACH YOU -- FOR A PERCENTAGE OF YOUR TAKE.
WOW -- KINDA LIKE A SCHOLARSHIP!
DID I JUST DREAM THAT WHOLE SCENE?
NOPE -- BUT IT SURE WAS WEIRD, WASN'T IT?
DID YOU NOTICE HOW CLOSE THOSE KIDS WERE TO ACTUALLY GETTING INTO THE CAR?
TAP TAP

YEAH... TALENT ALONE WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN THEM THROUGH THE DEFENSES THEY DID!
UH HUH. THERE IS SOMETHING SCREWY GOING ON! FIRST THE WINDOW, NOW THIS!
WHAT ELSE COULD---
WOOP WOOP WOOP
I HAD TO ASK... COP ON OUR TAIL, BIANCA!
I'LL TURN THE CAR INTO A TIE FIGHTER! HEH, HEH-- THAT'LL FIX HIM!
FRED'S FINGERS QUICKLY TAP OUT A CODE ON THE FREDMOBILE'S KEYBOARD AND...
NOTHING?! THE CAR DIDN'T CHANGE!
B-BUT IT ALWAYS CHANGES!
THIS IS THE POLICE! RESISTANCE IS FUTILE! SURRENDER OR DIE!
SUBTLE, AREN'T THEY?
HANG ON TIGHT, BIANCA! I'M GOING TO HAVE TO LOSE HIM THE OLD FASHIONED WAY!
NOT THE OLD FASHIONED WAY! IT'S ONLY BEEN AN HOUR SINCE I ATE!
IT'S EITHER THAT OR GET CAUGHT!
AND WOULD YOU MIND FACING THE OTHER WAY-- JUST IN CASE?
WE KNOW YOUR EVERY MOVE!
MOMENTS LATER...
PHEW! HAVEN'T HAD TO USE THIS TRICK IN YEARS!
ESCAPE IS IMPOSSIBLE!

SOMETHING'S GOT TO BE CAUSING ALL THESE SCREW UPS! SOME SIMPLE THING...
BUT I CAN'T QUITE PUT MY FINGER ON IT!
TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP
YEAH--THIS JUST ISN'T REAL!
OF COURSE! THAT'S OUR PROBLEM--IT IS REAL!
HUH?
REALITY! SOMEONE MUST HAVE BROUGHT REALITY TO THIS UNIVERSE!
GASPE ARE YOU SURE?
THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT! WHAT'S THE SINGLE MOST UNREALISTIC THING WE DO IN THIS UNIVERSE?
GEE, THERE'S SO MUCH TO CHOOSE FROM, BEING COMIC CHARACTERS AND KNOWING IT--WAIT! TIME TRAVELLING!
SO, IF TIME TRAVEL MEANS NO REALITY, THEN NO TIME TRAVEL MEANS REALITY!
SET THE WAYBACK MACHINE FOR OCTOBER 17, 1981!
DONE!
CLICK!
HERE GOES NOTHING!
NOTHING IS RIGHT!
THAT'S IT--MY MUNCH WAS RIGHT! WE'VE GOT REALITY!
WHAT A REVOLTING DEVELOPMENT!
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PORCUPINE SYSTEM, THE:
SO NAMED BECAUSE IT'S THE ONLY SYSTEM IN THE GALAXY *NO AUTHORITY* ——THE C.I., INTERPOL*, THE IRS**, NOT EVEN FRED'S FATHER——MAY APPROACH. THIS ANARCHIC SYSTEM IS THE HOME OF MANY OF THE GALAXY'S MOST FAMOUS *CRIMINALS*.
——THE SPACEFARER'S GUIDE
SO WHY CAN'T WE CONTINUE AS THIEVES? I MEAN, A LOCK IS A LOCK IS A LOCK...
* INTERSTELLAR POLICE
** INTERSTELLAR REVENUE SERVICE
OH, SURE, WE *COULD* DO THAT...
BUT WE'RE THE BEST THERE IS-- ALL *THIEFDOM* LOOKS UP TO US!
IF WE CAN'T PULL OUR JOBS OFF WITH PANACHE, THEN WHAT'S THE *PURPOSE*?
YEAH, WE'D BE NO BETTER THAN *REAL* THIEVES!
FACE IT, OUR *CAREER*, OUR *LIFESTYLE*— THEY'RE SHOT TO HELL UNLESS WE GET RID OF REALITY...
OF COURSE! THAT'S IT!

WHAT'S IT?
STEALING REALITY!
IT'S THE ANSWER TO OUR PROBLEM!
STEAL--? HOW DO YOU STEAL A CONCEPT?
THINK CONCEPTUALLY, FRED! I FIGURE THE CI BROUGHT REALITY INTO THIS UNIVERSE JUST TO GET US--
--AND IF THEY CAN SNEAK IT IN, WE CAN KICK IT OUT!
RIGHT! WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO PLAN THIS JOB CAREFULLY-- AND TAKE REALITY INTO ACCOUNT, TOO!
TWO WEEKS LATER...
YES, I DO BELIEVE WE'VE DONE IT THIS TIME! WHAT A COUP THIS IS!
14 STRAIGHT DAYS WITHOUT HEARING ABOUT FRED & BIANCA!
THAT'S A RECORD, BOSS!
THEN I GATHER YOU'RE PLEASED WITH MY WORK THUS FAR?
QUITE PLEASED!
EXCELLENT! I THINK THIS WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO DISCUSS THE FINAL TERMS OF OUR AGREEMENT, DON'T YOU?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, FINAL? WE GAVE YOU EVERYTHING YOU ASKED FOR TO BEGIN WITH!
AND THE WORK HERE IS EASIER, TOO!
YEAH--OUR UNIVERSE IS EIGHT TIMES SMALLER THAN YOUR LAST ONE!

TRUE--BUT I CAME HERE SO I COULD BRANCH OUT --TAKE OVER THE INDEPENDENTS! I'VE BEEN WAITING YEARS TO GET AHOLD OF THAT AARDVARK! AND THOSE DAMN ELVES! AND--
I'D LOVE TO DISCUSS IT, BUT LOOK AT THE TIME!
GOTTA BE GOING NOW! LET'S DO LUNCH SOMETIME!
LIKE NEXT CENTURY!
BYE, NOW!
SEVERAL HOURS LATER...
CONTINUITY INQUISITION
MY LEGS ARE TIRED FROM ALL THIS STANDING AROUND.
I NEVER NOTICED IT BEFORE WE GOT REAL.
THEY'RE EVEN MORE LAX THAN USUAL!
'BOUT TIME THIS REALITY BIT DID US SOME GOOD!
YEAH, THEY'LL PROBABLY FIRE US SOON-- THAT REALITY GUY MAKES IT JUST ABOUT IMPOSSIBLE TO BREAK IN HERE!
"JUST ABOUT" ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH AS FAR AS WE'RE CONCERNED
SHHH! KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN!
WITH REALITY AROUND, SOMEONE MIGHT HEAR OUR VOICES UNLESS WE WHISPER!
OH, YEAH-- I FORGOT!

IS THE COAST CLEAR?
CLOSE ENOUGH! WE OUGHTA BE ABLE TO SNEAK PAST TWO GUARDS!
I GOTTA GO TO THE BATHROOM! THAT'S NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE!
DOES THIS PLACE EVEN HAVE A BATHROOM?
I DUNNO-- BUT DID YOU EVER NOTICE HOW BORING THIS JOB IS?
USING THE ELEVATOR AGAIN! I'LL HAVE TO HAVE A LITTLE CHAT WITH HENRY AFTER THIS ADVENTURE IS OVER!
WHEN THE ELEVATOR ARRIVES...
AND I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET BOOTS ON MY BACK HOOVES FOR TWO WEEKS!
NOW WHAT? REALISTICALLY, THEY'RE BOUND TO SEE US!
BUT REALISTICALLY, ANYONE WHO'D WORK FOR WHAT THE CI PAYS IS STUPID, TOO!
SAY, WASN'T THAT FRED AND BIANCA GETTING INTO THE ELEVATOR?
OH, GET REAL! THEY'RE HELPLESS WITH REALITY HERE!
WELL, IF YOU SAY SO...
THIS IS THE LAST TIME WE USE AN ELEVATOR--EVEN IF IT IS IN THE PLOT!
RELAX, WE'RE ALMOST--
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UHOH -- THE ELEVATOR'S SLOWING DOWN!
BEFORE OUR FLOOR, TOO!
SECONDS LATER...
IT'S BEEN A GREAT COUPLE OF WEEKS, DANNY! I'VE BEEN SLEEPING WELL, MY BOWELS HAVE BEEN REGULAR!
I'M JUST FEELING PRETTY WONDERFUL
AND IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF THE STATISTICALLY UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES INHIBITING DEVICE!
WHAT SAY WE CHECK IN ON HIM AND THEN CALL IT A DAY?
DID YOU HEAR THAT MOUTHFUL? WHAT A STUPID NAME FOR REALITY!
FER SHURE!
I WISH HE COULD SEE MY FIST IN HIS FACE!
SHH! STEALING REALITY WILL BE REVENGE ENOUGH ON THOSE BUFFOONS!
I'LL BET THEY SAVE US A LOT OF WORK--
I TELL YOU, DANNY, IF ONLY I COULD SEE FRED AND BIANCA'S FACES RIGHT NOW, MY VICTORY WOULD BE COMPLETE!
--AND LEAD US STRAIGHT TO OL' REALITY HIMSELF!
WE'LL HAVE A VICTORY CELEBRATION SOON! I THINK WE SHOULD INVITE THE THIEVES! HEH, HEH!
HA, HA! GREAT IDEA!
NO NEED, GUYS -- WE'RE ALREADY HERE!
"HEH, HEH."

HEY! D'YA MIND -- I'M TAKING A BATH!
SORRY! JUST WANTED TO MAKE SURE YOU HAD EVERYTHING YOU NEEDED!
HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT MY RAISE, YET?
RAISE? I'VE TAKEN IT UNDER ADVISEMENT... TALK TO MY SECRETARY ABOUT A LUNCH DATE! BE SEEING YOU!
OKAY, THEY'RE GONE! LET'S DO IT!
RIGHTIO! ONE REALITY IN A BOX, COMING UP!
COME ON! CAN'T A CONCEPT TAKE A BATH WITHOUT--
WELL, WELL, WELL -- LOOK WHO IT IS!
MY TWO FAVORITE EX-THIEVES!
HEE, HEE! MADE THAT ONE UP MYSELF!
DO TELL... MY BOY--
DANGER REALITY
-- WE'VE COME TO PUT YOU OUT OF BUSINESS!
NOW BE A GOOD LITTLE CONCEPT AND GET INTO THE CASE!
CRUNCH! BLAM! CRUNCH! OOF CRUNCH! POW! AUGH!
KA THUD OOF!

IS IT SAFE TO LOOK, YET?
BUT OF COURSE, MY DEAR! THIS JOB'S IN THE BAG, SO TO SPEAK!
ANGER REALITY
LEMME OUTTA HERE!
AW, COME ON--NOTHING'S HAPPENING UP HERE! IT'S JUST YOUR IMAGINATION!
JUST LIKE AT THE ELEVATOR!
I TELL YOU I HEARD SOMETHING! REALLY'
OOOO! LOOK AT THAT! NOW WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY FOR YOURSELF?!
OOPS?
SOMEONE'S TAKEN REALITY'
WHO?
FRED AND BIANCA, THAT'S WHO!
I TOLD YOU I SAW THEM, BUT WOULD YOU BELIEVE ME?
NOOOOO!
ALMOST LIKE THE GOOD OLD DAYS, EH, FRED?
CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!
TRUE, SO TRUE! AND--AS OLD TUSK FACE SAID--IF I COULD SEE HIS FACE MY VICTORY WOULD BE COMPLETE!
THERE THEY GO!
WE BETTER NOTIFY THE SPACE CRUISERS TO BE WATCHING FOR THEM!
VOOSH!
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ABOVE THE PLANET...
WE ARE THE CONTINUITY INQUISITION. HALT!
OUR CHIEF WEAPON IS SURPRISE!
NO, YOU FOOL-- IT'S FEAR!
WRONG! IT'S OUR ALMOST FANATICAL DEVOTION TO THE CONTINUUM!
HA! FOOLISH THIEVES--YOU BE SOME DOOMED PUPPIES, NOW!
IS THERE ANY WAY TO SHUT HIM UP?
SIGHS I WISH!
DANGER
JUST BECAUSE YOU HAVE ME DOESN'T MEAN YOU CONTROL ME!
OH, YEAH? JUST WATCH AS I HANG A LOUIE AND FLIP EFFORTLESSLY THROUGH THIS ASTEROID FIELD!
WAIT A MINUTE-- YOU CAN'T BE DOING THAT! IT'S UNREALISTIC!
WOW! YOU ALMOST GOT US KILLED WITH THAT REALISM BIT!
SURPRISE!
FEAR!
NOT ALL OF US-- YOU CAN'T KILL A CONCEPT!
NO-- RUTHLESS EFFICIENCY!

OUT OF THE ASTEROIDS AND INTO THE FIRING SQUAD!
WHO CARES WHAT OUR CHIEF WEAPON IS?
WE GOT 'EM NOW!
REALITY WORKS BOTH WAYS, BUSTER! THOSE SHIPS CAN'T TURN THAT QUICKLY!
SUDDENLY...
I THOUGHT WE HAD 'EM -- WHAT HAPPENED?
DAMN--TURNED AGAINST MYSELF!
WAY TO GO, BIANCA!
IF YOU THINK THAT WAS SOMETHING, WAIT 'TIL YOU SEE MY NEXT TRICK!
BLAM! BLAM!
CLICK TAC TAC
DO YOU HAVE TO BE SO LOUD WHEN YOU'RE TRICKING?
SEVERAL MINUTES LATER
NOW WE ADD THE SECRET INGREDIENT --REALITY!
HEY--THAT HURT!
BIANCA, WHAT, PRAY TELL, HAVE YOU JUST BUILT?
A NEW WEAPON-- ONE THAT FIRES BOLTS OF PURE REALITY!

NOW, WITH THIS LITTLE BABY, WE CONTROL REALITY!

ARE YOU SURE IT'LL WORK?

NO, BUT I FIGURED NOTHING ELSE WAS WORKING SO WHY NOT GIVE THIS A SHOT -- A SHOT OF CONCENTRATED REALITY!

BLAM!

WHOOP!

BANG!

SPINNING

THOOM

CRUNCH

BLA-BLOOEY!

WE'VE BEEN HIT!

WHAT THE HELL -- WE'RE DROPPING TO SUBLIGHT SPEED! FIRST OFFICER, WHAT HAPPENED?

CRACKLE!

SWAP!

THAT BEAM HIT US! IT SHORTED OUT ALL OUR FASTER-THAN-LIGHT SYSTEMS!

YEE HA! IT WORKED!

GREAT! NOW, WHILE THEY'RE CONFUSED, LET'S MAKE A RUN FOR THE TIME STREAM! WE'LL LOSE 'EM THERE!

THERE THEY GO! STAY CLOSE TO THEM!
HOLD HER STEADY, FREDDY! THIS IS WHERE THE FUN STARTS!
WHA--? WE'RE DROPPING OUT OF THE TIME STREAM!
HEY-- WHO TURNED OFF THE SHIP?!
SIR... UM... WE'RE OUT OF GAS!
ALL RIGHT!
THEY'RE DROPPING LIKE FLIES! AM I A GENIUS OR WHAT?
YOU'RE BOTH, BABE! AND NOW THAT YOU'VE GIVEN US THE ULTIMATE WEAPON, HEH, HEH--
"--I THINK WE SHOULD USE IT TO GET RID OF OUR ULTIMATE MENACE ONCE AND FOR ALL-- THE IRS!!!"
"FINE WITH ME, FRED, BUT WHERE'LL WE FIND HIM?"
"CHECK THE COMPUTER, BIANCA, WHOEVER OWES THEM THE MOST MONEY, AND CAN'T PAY IT, IS WHERE HE'LL BE!"
"AND THEY CALL US THIEVES! GOT A LOCATION, FRED, IT'S..."
INTERSTELLAR REVENUE SERVICE
...THE PLANET FRAMMINGHAM IS CONTRACTING US--IT'S VICE PRESIDENT WESKIT...
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THEY ADMIT THEIR FAILURE TO PAY THEIR PROPER TAXES.
VERY WISE OF THEM
THEY ALSO CLAIM EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES LEAD TO THAT FAILURE.
EXCUSES ARE UNACCEPTABLE IN MATTERS CONCERNING TAXES
THEY WISH TO PAY THEIR TAXES.
COMMENDABLE
BUT CANNOT AT THIS TIME.
INFORM THE FRAMMINGHAMIANS THEY NEED NOT CONCERN THEMSELVES WITH THEIR DELINQUENT TAXES. I WILL AUCTION THEIR PLANET TO PAY THEM.
THERE HE IS, BIANCA! I'M MOVING INTO RANGE NOW!
I'M READY-- I'LL GIVE HIM A BOLT OF REALITY RIGHT BETWEEN THE EYES!
DISREGARD MY PREVIOUS DECLARATION.
ALTER OUR COURSE TO INTERCEPT THAT SHIP IMMEDIATELY.
BUT, SIR-- THE PLANET OUR EXPENSES, THE LOST REVENUE!
FRAMMINGHAM'S TAXES ARE NEGLIGIBLE IN COMPARISON TO THOSE OWED BY PANSAFREDICOPACOG AND BIANCA
SOON-- NO MORE TAXES! NO MORE YEARLY FILING! NO AUDITS!
BUT, FRED-- YOU DON'T PAY TAXES, FILE RETURNS, OR GET AUDITED!
IT'S THE PRINCIPLE OF THE THING, BIANCA! NOW, FULL POWER, SCOTTER, BIANCA!
I'M GIVIN' 'ER EVER'THING SHE'S GOT NOW!

THE BLAST HITS THE AGENT HEAD ON! BUT--
SPLATTER
SPLUSH
SPLATTER
SQUISH
--NOTHING HAPPENS!
F-FRED--IT DIDN'T WORK!
NO, WAIT-- SOMETHING HAPPENED!! IS IT MY IMAGINATION OR IS THAT SHIP GROWING?
IT'S GROWING -- THE WEAPON MUST HAVE BACKFIRED! LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!
NEVER HAVE I FELT SO ALMOST ALIVE, SO ALMOST INVIGORATED.
BEFORE THE IRS SHIP CAN CATCH THEM, THE FREDMOBILE HAS SKIPPED AWAY IN A RANDOM SERIES OF HYPERSPACE JUMPS!
JUST WHEN I THOUGHT REALITY WAS GETTING USEFUL THIS HAPPENS!
YEAH! I THOUGHT WE'D HAVE THE UNIVERSE ON A PLATTER-- NOT ALMOST GET SERVED UP ON ONE!
HEE, HEE! I KNOW WHAT WENT WRONG!
TAXATION IS THE ULTIMATE REALITY-- IT EVEN BEATS OUT DEATH IN COMICS! CONCENTRATED REALITY STRENGTHENS THE IRS!
WONDERFUL...
WELL, THAT'S JUST PEACHY KEEN. I MEAN, THE KABOOKIE REALLY HIT THE FAN WITH THIS ONE!

I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF THIS REALITY JERK AND I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE IT ANY MORE!
HE'S TOO DANGEROUS TO LET STAY HERE!
SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?
THROW HIM OUT OF THIS UNIVERSE-- BY PITCHING HIM OUT OF THIS BOOK!
NO, YOU CAN'T -- I'VE GOT A CONTRACT! AND A RAISE COMING!
POOF
DANGER REALITY
NOW YOU GET REAL! DAVE KRAFT HANDING OUT RAISES? HA!
BIANCA, HOW CLOSE ARE WE TO THE END OF THIS PAGE?
WE'VE GOT ROOM FOR TWO PANELS. DO YOU THINK MARK CAN GET IT ALL DONE IN THAT SPACE?
NO SWEAT, SEE? ONE PANEL LATER AND I'M OUTSIDE THE CAR!
I THINK THE GUY'S GOT UNREAL POTENTIAL!
NOW, GO BYE, BYE, REALITY!
YAH!
WELL, THAT TAKES CARE OF THAT!
FFFT!
FFFT!
VEAH, BUT I WONDER WHERE REALITY WILL END UP?
22

ANOTHER UNIVERSE, ANOTHER BOOK...

WHOOSH

DANGER REALITY

THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP OOF! OOF! OOF! OOF!

WELL, NOW, WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

HEY, THERE'S WRITING ON THE CASE!

DANGER--REALITY.

COULD IT BE? YO, REALITY--YOU IN THERE?

OF COURSE I'M IN HERE! LET ME OUT!

NO CAN DO, LIL BUDDY. OUR ORDERS WERE REAL SPECIFIC-- IF YOU CAME BACK YOU WERE TO BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY!

BUT-- BUT--

DANGER REALITY

ADMIT IT, REALITY--EVEN CONFINED LIKE THAT AREN'T YOU THRILLED TO BE BACK HOME!

YOU MAY HAVE WON THE BATTLE, X-THIEVES, BUT REALITY WILL WIN THE WAR! SO I SWEAR!

NEXT ISSUE: FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE THIEVES BLOW A THEFT!

END

Stealing a few days R&R in an empty time-share unit. The security chief (that's his thumbprint in the corner) was sure he recognized us from somewhere!

(CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER)

like it, we can vote for someone who will change the law — or run for office ourselves even! But would you deny that taxes do not provide for many worthwhile and necessary things? Police, fire fighters, hospitals, highways, communications, aid to the unemployed, the sick, or the destitute, support of the cultural arts, etc. We *do* get a lot back for the taxes we pay. If you wanted to count dollar for dollar, then maybe some of us get back less than we pay in (others, of course, get more) but the remainder could be viewed as a payment towards having a fair and just society.

Next, do you mean to say that people *like* to have things stolen from them? Okay, so maybe people don't like paying taxes (though I would hope that at least *some* of our readers support them on principle), but is theft a desirable alternative? Okay, so maybe (maybe!) insurance does pay for the cost of stolen goods, but you ask anyone who has had their house or apartment broken into (whether they were present or not) if insurance money can compensate for the distress and hardship the incident caused (not to mention the possible loss of items that are irreplacable for sentimental reasons) and most would answer in the negative. And say, insurance isn't free! The more theft there is in society the higher the premiums are for everyone — whether they are actually robbed or not.

Now, on to the issue at hand, specifically.

As I said above, you very astutely gave Fred and Bianca a worthwhile mission upon which to embark. This made thier alliance with the Knights both logical and interesting. And the choice of Coca-Cola as the object of the search also led to some humourous moments. There were some good chuckles on the way in which the formula was hidden and in the reaction to New Coke by the 1950s executive. I must say that the page containing the formula looked much too mathematical and too complex. I've always thought the formula for Coke must be something like: carbonated water, sugar, flavouring, advertising, advertising, advertising, advertising, advertising, advertising, and advertising. Plus, the secret ingredient: Advertising.

However, with all the cute goings-on, I found that one thing from the previous issue was mostly absent: Snappy banter. I hope it returns next issue.

Fred made good (if sneaky) use of his immunity card, didn't he? However, I thought the scene on page 22 with the IRS agent was quite interesting. He had Fred dead to rights, but when presented with a legal (well, supposedly legal) document, he obeyed its intentions and passed over his no doubt deep desire for revenge on Fred. If the situations had been reversed, would Fred have done the same thing? I seriously doubt it! Fred has no use for rules unless they are to his benefit. He leeches off the system and what it provides but attempts to undermine it.

So we're going to have three different microseries on Fred and/or Bianca, eh? That'll make no less than *five* first issues for the X-Thieves! (Maybe that'll make #2 the true collector's item!) If this marketing ploy works, you guys will probably just have *every* issue be a first issue — ha ha! No, wait, forget I said that! Don't do it! ("Next Month: SOUTHERN KNIGHTS CASEBOOK #1 and X-THIEVES #1, followed by SOUTHERN KNIGHTS BOOKCASE #1 and THIEVES-X #1, followed by...")

"T.M. Maple"
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You're right, this book is entirely done in fun. No, I don't seriously support thievery as a way of making a living — but if I can't write about things I don't necessarily support then I have no business being in the writing business.

You make many arguments against my libertarian statement concerning taxation that I'd like to discuss. For instance, why should the government provide support for the cultural arts? If an art form isn't popular enough to be self supporting, then it should die. I mean, I don't expect — or want — the government to bolster the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS or X-THIEVES if sales aren't high enough to continue publishing the books, so why should, say, ballet be treated any differently?

However.

I don't want to turn this letter column into a political arena. For that reason I'm not going to go into my arguments. Suffice it to say, I don't agree with you on many matters concerning government, and let's leave it at that. Sound okay to you?

BACK ISSUES

There are many more than 500 comic books being published today! Out of all those, the latest OVERSTREET PRICE GUIDE UPDATE — one of the most unbiased sources of true scarcity and value in the comics-collecting hobby — lists ***very few*** *as being genuinely hot. Of those, even fewer have* ***every issue*** *of the title listed as* ***hot****. There are 22 titles, to be exact, that have the complete run listed as* ***hot****. 22 out of over 500. And the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS is one of those 22.*

Crusaders #1: *(August 1982) 4350 copies printed. This was our very first issue (the title changed with #2) and it is* ***very*** *hard to find! So many people have written that I have decided to sell my personal collection for* ***SOLD OUT*** *These three copies will be available on a first come, first served basis for $35 each. Only one to a customer.*

Southern Knights #2: *(January 1983) 6022 printed. We have a limited number of these available by the following arrangement:*

~~*The first 25 will sell for $2 per copy.*~~

The next 25 will sell for $10 per copy.

The final 25 will be $15 per copy.

Southern Knights #3 and #4: *(August & November 1983) 7086 & 6430 printed. Again, we have a limited number of each of these issues available. They're for sale for $5 per copy while our stocks last.*

Southern Knights #5: *(March 1984) 5007 printed. Next to our first issue, this is the rarest issue. We have less than 50 of these left! What we have is for sale at $8.50 per copy.*

Southern Knights #6 and #7: *(July & September 1984) 5500 each printed. These were the last two issues published by the Guild. What few copies we have are for sale at $4 per copy until we run out. The above comic books are available directly from:*

THE GUILD
P.O. Box 8396
Greenville, SC 29606

Please make all checks payable to ***Henry Vogel****. Prices above are postpaid. All will be autographed at your request.*

Southern Knights #8 through present: *These books are all available directly from Comics Interview Publications at a cost of $3.00 each, postpaid — any two for $5 postpaid — with the exception of SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #8 which counts as two issues ($5.). IMPORTANT NOTE: Issues #12 and #14 are SOLD OUT! Send your order to*

FICTIONEER BOOKS, LTD
Suite 301 - SK
234 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10001

Make checks payable to ***FICTIONEER BOOKS****. I hope this answers any questions you may have concerning back issues!*

Henry Vogel

Dear Henry and Mark,

Apart from the length of the title, the X-THIEVES mag is beginning to grow on me. This is mainly because the two main characters are beginning to grow on me. To be sure, as "TM" points out, these are a pair of thieves we're talking about, but this is a fun book, and Fred and Bianca are fun people (or whatever Fred is). They'd look even better in colour, judging by the lovely cover. I know B&W books are the thing of the moment, and that colour is more expensive, but you should consider that innovation for the book.

Centering a story round the Coke formula is good for a few laughs, especially the part set in the '50s where **Woodruff** is trying to come up with a slogan. You've succeeded in cleverly throwing a bit of hindsight into the scenes set in the past, in true BACK TO THE FUTURE fashion.

Some of the other ideas in the book suffer from a bit of a lack of originality. The Fredmobile is the same as the current (in the UK) shape-changing Tardis that a certain Time Lord uses, whilst various other ideas are similar to things found in the HITCH HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY, which you've quoted occasionally, too.

THE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, whose comic I don't usually read, entered into the fray of things and looked pretty good doing it — I may even start picking up their own title. I've read the first Graphic Novel reprinting their earlier exploits, and they've matured a little since then.

Finally, **Mark Propst** looks like a pretty good artist. The cover and splash pages were great. Some of the interior was a little inconsistent, and it looks as if not enough time was taken on some of the pages. This may be deadline pressure, but nevertheless needs slight improvement.

But altogether, an entertaining read, which is what it sets out to be. Stealing reality, huh? I won't sleep soundly at night any more! I'm interested in seeing where the X-THIEVES go from here, anyway, and will be back next issue.

Malcolm Bourne
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*While I'll freely admit the huge interior of the Fredmobile was inspired by the TARDIS in DR. WHO (one of the best TV programs of all time, in my opinion), I must say the shape-changing ability came from somewhere else entirely. It was DAK's exasperation with THE TRANSFORMERS and all those other shape-changing toys taken to the ultimate ludicrous extreme. It's just another case of great minds thinking alike — you see, Malcolm, we have yet to get the episodes of DR. WHO featuring the repaired chameleon circuit (*SIGH* I'll miss the old blue police call box) in our area of the U.S.*

ECLIPSE PRESENTS

Dave Stevens

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